

TOWARDS A CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF READING

SYLLABUS

Purpose: To see a Christian theology of reading fleshed out; in particular, to see why Christians read and why Christians practice discernment with their readings while also expounding of how to be discerning, and how to read for the purpose of Christian growth and glorifying (thereby, enjoying) the Lord.

TABLE OF CONTENT (TENTATIVE SCHEDULE)

1. Why Christians Read
 - Why Christians read the Bible
 - Why Christians read other books
 - Case Study: Strong Christians read
2. Why and How Christians should practice discernment in reading
 - Bible
 - Non-Canonical Books**
3. How to read with discernment
 - The Bible
 - Non-Canonical Books
4. What to Read
 - I.
 - II.
 - III.
- IV. Discernment in selecting non-canonical books
 - a. Why you should be discerning (selective) of what you want to read
 - i. In general Christians should always be discerning: We have to be discerning of what is Biblical or not when we are reading.
 1. “*But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21)
 2. Selecting books will be among the Christian discipline of discernment.
 - ii. We don’t have time to read everything.
“But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.” (Ecclesiastes 12:12)
 - iii. Not everything is edifying to read.
 1. “How each writer approaches these topics can be wise and biblically informed—or not. And due to the spiritual dangers associated with these practical books, readers should choose them very carefully.”¹

¹ Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 100

2. Beware of books that you are not spiritually discerning yet to read.
 3. Some books should never be read by Christians (pornography, certain temptations, etc).
- b. Goal in selecting non-canonical books
- i. You should pick what best edifies you at your present spiritual life.
 - ii. You should pick non-canonical works that gives better understanding of God's world.
 1. Books that by God's common grace capture reality accurately.
 2. At times, for the spiritually discerning, there is a role of reading books reflecting the worldviews of the other side so that we might fully understand non-Christian worldviews and where people are coming from.
 - iii. You should pick non-canonical that best serves others according to one's spiritual gift and abilities.
- For example:
1. Apologist—Reading works of false teaching and worldly philosophy to respond to them.
 2. Pastors—Read Biblical language grammar text to accurately understand the Word better.
- c. How to select what you read
- i. Seek help from your Pastor
 1. Reason: “Specific recommendations are often best discovered under the guidance of a wise and well-read pastor who knows you.”²
 2. How:
 - a. See a topic of concern then ask for book recommendations.
 - b. Or even ask for what areas and topic and books related to that area your pastor should recommend you to read.
 - ii. Realize you have to ask questions about the book
“Before you begin reading a book, determine its purpose in your life. *Why* are you reading this book? What makes it better than the ten thousand books you ignored? Is it part of your spiritual diet, for personal change, or just for fun?”³
 - iii. Skim through the book before reading it
 1. Reason: “...skimming a book and giving it a superficial reading are valuable exercises for deciding whether a book is worth reading more slowly and in depth.”⁴
 2. How:
 - a. Read the back of the book: What is the book about?

² Ibid.

³ Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 111

⁴ David L. McKenna, *How to Read a Christian Book* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2001), 44.

- b. Look at the table of content and try to answer the question: How is the book organize to achieve it's purpose?
- c. Scan through it
 - i. Pick a chapter or section that would be controversial: What is it's view?
 - ii. Pick a chapter or section that would serve you: Does it seem helpful?
 - iii. Look at footnotes: What sources is it quoting from? Are you aware of anything about them?
- iv. Research further about the book's background
 - 1. How: "Before I read a book, I run a quick search online to browse bookstore reviews, find concise summaries, read endorsements, and check for any high profile blurbs that have been published about the book."⁵
 - 2. Reason: "This step also acquaints me with the authors I read. Who are they? Where do they work? What worldview do they represent? This critical step helps to prepare me for what I am about to read and can alert me to the author's motivations."⁶
- v. Knowing the author's strength and weaknesses
 - 1. Reason: "Becoming a discerning reader requires that we determine which authors can be trusted in specific categories. An author that will be helpful in one category can be very unhelpful in another category."⁷
 - 2. How: As Christians grow as readers more authors will be familiar to the believer so knowing the author's strength and weaknesses from other sources (other book by author, reviews, etc) will help one selection.
- vi. Practice reading more: "The more years, the more reading experience, the less time you need before you can close and shelve a book."⁸

⁵ Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 112

⁶ Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 112

⁷ Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 107

⁸ Tony Reinke, *Lit! A Christian Guide to Reading Books* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 115